

examine the increasing number of cases in Texas where innocent citizens have been wrongfully convicted, identify the causes of those tragedies and flaws in our criminal justice and recommend changes to prevent such future miscarriages of justice.

***Statewide Habeas Public Defender Office - SB 1655*** In 2001, I passed landmark legislation to overhaul Texas' indigent criminal defense system to ensure all Texans are guaranteed their constitutional right to effective counsel. This session, SB 1655, would have furthered this effort by creating the first statewide Public Defender office in Texas to ensure quality legal representation for indigent defendants in capital habeas proceedings. The Senate passed SB 1655 unanimously, but the legislation failed to pass the House.

***Mental illness gun background checks - SB 1755***

Following the horrible tragedy at Virginia Tech, I introduced legislation to require Texas to finally turn over mental health commitment information to the United States Department of Justice National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). Currently, persons in Texas involuntarily committed to psychiatric hospitals can easily purchase and possess firearms despite having a court finding that they are likely to cause serious harm to themselves or to others. The Senate passed SB 1755 but it failed to pass the House. However, legislation is currently pending in the United States Congress which, if passed, will give states incentives to report mental health data to NICS.

**Creating Opportunities for Texans to Own their First Home – SB1908**

I am very proud to have passed the state's most comprehensive housing legislation since 2003.

SB 1908 improves the first-time homebuyer program by allowing down-payment and closing costs loan assistance for first-time homebuyers with up to 80 percent of area mean family income (~\$48,800 for a family in Houston); dedicates 5% of HOME funds for housing for the disabled in any area of the state; establishes criteria for the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) to develop a more equitable distribution of tax credits for multifamily affordable housing projects in both rural and urban areas across the state; and ensures greater transparency in TDHCA operations, while also giving the agency clear authority to penalize bad developers.

The bill also provides incentives to encourage developers to provide free notary public services to residents and build in areas that have recently been declared disaster areas and grants eligible municipalities the authority to adopt an Urban Land Bank Program to allow the private sale of tax-foreclosed property for the purposes of affordable housing development.

### **Protecting the Free Press**

The press plays a vitally important role in our democracy and must be protected from government intimidation. That is why I filed the **Free Flow of Information Act** which struck a delicate balance between preserving the public's right to know the truth from an independent press, and the state's ability to uphold justice. Thirty-three other states and the District of Columbia currently have some form of law protecting journalists and their sources. I fully intend to bring this issue back before the legislature next session, because a free and independent press is vital to our democracy.

### **Now is not the time to retreat.**

As you can see it was a busy and productive session (and this was by no means an exhaustive list!). I want to thank you for all the



calls and notes of support you sent me during the legislative session. Now is not the time to retreat. We work over the interim session to develop our agenda build more support for issues that I believe will build a brighter and better future for all Texans.

Sincerely,

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